

**Testimony of Tom Dinell, FAICP, in  
Support of Bill 20 (2015) Being Heard by  
the Zoning and Planning Committee  
Thursday July 23, 2015**

RECEIVED  
CITY CLERK  
C & C OF HONOLULU  
2015 JUL 22 PM 3:00

The fastest and most efficient way to increase the stock of affordable housing in Honolulu is to adopt Bill 20 (2015) facilitating the construction of accessory dwelling units.

Currently we do not welcome this opportunity, but puts roadblocks in the way. The most discouraging roadblock is that legally an 'ohana unit can only be for immediate family. That is a ridiculous requirement when accessory dwelling units offer the possibility of adding thousands of rental units to our inadequate housing stock and at minimal cost to government. Bill 20 eliminates that requirement.

The second unnecessary legal requirement in Honolulu is that the 'ohana unit must be attached to or entirely contained within the main house. That may or may not be the best configuration depending on the site in question. Bill 20 eliminates that requirement.

Furthermore, two off-street parking spaces are currently required. Bill 20 makes that one space or no space if within a half mile of a rail station.

Bill 20 (Section 21-5 (c) (5) (D) should be amended to require a minimum six month rental period as recommended by the Department of Planning and Permitting. Six-months is much preferable to the three-month minimum specified in the initial Bill 20. ADUs must not become vacation rental units.

Bill 20 wisely specifies that a parcel with an ADU cannot be subdivided. It also includes a reasonable amnesty clause.

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) make sense in existing neighborhoods, new subdivisions and new residential high rises, such as condominiums.

So what makes accessory dwelling units so desirable?

MISC. COM. 2588

- ☐ The landowner and/or developer, and not the government, pays the cost of building the ADU.

- ☐ When the family only restriction is removed, the vast number of new ADUs will be rental units, thus increasing our stock of rental housing. Many, if not most, of the new ADUs units will fall in the affordable range, without any legal requirement to do so, and thus increase the stock of available affordable rental housing.
- The proposed ordinance implements one of the important recommendations of the Action Plan for Making Honolulu an Age-Friendly City, namely, increasing the supply of affordable rental housing available to seniors. The City Council, under the leadership of Budget Chair Ann Kobayashi, has been a major supporter of making Honolulu an age-friendly city.
- ☐ An ADU will provide a homeowner or condominium owner with an additional source of income to pay a mortgage or to use for other purposes.
- ☐ The new ADUs will contribute significantly to implementing the General Plan goal to direct increased population into the Honolulu urban core and the 'Ewa Plain.
- ☐ Since the ADU is next to or within the main home, the landowner is in all likelihood going to assure that the tenants are good neighbors and the property is well maintained.
- ☐ Household structure is changing. We have many more couples and single persons, young, old and in between, to house today than ever before and relatively small ADUs are an attractive means of housing these folks.
- ☐ The needed reforms can be instituted quickly and new legal ADU units can begin to come on line within a year.

So what are the big objections to the City putting out the welcoming mat for new legal ADUs?

- ☐ Our aging sewer system will be overloaded.
- ☐ Parking will become a neighborhood nightmare.
- ☐ Density will increase, thus making the neighborhood less desirable.
- Many new ADUs will become vacation rentals.
- ☐ The landowner will subdivide the property and sell the accessory dwelling unit.

Currently steps are being taken to improve our sewer system. We need to reassess how many additional ADUs can be build in each target area, taking into account that the increased sewage flow from

an ADU is likely to be less than from the primary family unit, based on fewer occupants. Furthermore, there is no need to require separate water and sewer connections for an ADU.

Parking will always be a problem as long as we have a car-centric society, but the approach to resolving this dilemma lies not with restricting ADUs but on a much more citywide, macro policy level, including an examination of the high cost of free parking.

The six month minimum rental requirement will prevent ADUs from being transformed into vacation rental units.

We do have to begin to get use to increased density, whether it is in high rises or single-family neighborhoods. Honolulu's de facto population was 988,316 in 2010. It is estimated by the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism that that this number will be 1,093,210 in 2030, an increase of 11%, including an upturn of 25% of those over the age of 65. Where are all these people going to be housed in a city in which housing is already at a premium?

The potential pieces are in place. Given the political will, Honolulu can make a big dent in the lack of affordable housing, especially rental housing, relatively rapidly by implementing a vigorous, positive ADU housing program.

I am in agreement with the revisions in Bill 20 proposed by the Department of Planning and Permitting in its letters of March 17, 2015, and July 9, 2015, addressed to the Chair and Members of the City Council. Critically important is increasing the minimum lease period to six months.

Tom Dinell, FAICP, is an Emeritus Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Co-chair of the Age-Friendly City Steering Committee (term ended), and a planning consultant.